Permanent file

History of JUNEAU MISSION and the Work of the Willards

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The history of the Mission Home of Juneau would seem to begin in that of Chilkat. We had occupied the new log building at Haines just nine months -- working on it all the while too -- when the many long gathering difficulties culminated in such a way as to render its temporary closing imperative.

On the last of August, 1885, we closed its dear doors, after giving back to their friends all but ten of our native children. They went, many of them, in tears, begging us to come back soon and take them home again. This we promised to do should the Master open the way. They who came away with us did so only on condition that they should return to Chilkat when we did.

It was thought best, for the winter, to unite our forces at Sitka, and we entered into that arrangement in September, Mr. Willard assisting mechanically and ministerially, our assistant, Miss Matthews, taking charge of the laundry, while my time was employed in keeping house for our five selves, tending the sick of the school, cutting out sewing, and making the plans and drawings for the present model village in connection with the Sitka Mission.

The trip from Chilkat was made by canoe and row boat to Juneau (a hundred miles) when we tented on the beach for ten days, awaiting the coming of the monthly mail steamer for Sitka. The delay at this mining centre gave us ample opportunity to see the growing need for mission work. From the few log huts in the forest, the place had become a town. Natives were coming and had come from every tribe on the coast, until here were gathered hundreds speaking the same language, which we had become familiar with among the Chilkats.

Work was opening on ditches, sluices and mill sites for mining operations. Laborers were in demand, and good wages were of-

forod -- the natives were not slow in responding. On every hand dance houses and saloons had sprung up, but in all the town there was not a Christian school -- nor a Christian worker.

Dr. Corlies and his good wife, who, as independent missionaries, had long done good work in Wrangell, came in 1882 to work among the Ta-Koo tribe, whose village was located about twenty-five miles south and east of Juneau, and during their stay of two years these earnest workers spent the summers in Juneau, doing what they could. But in 1884 they were compelled, by duty to their family, to return to Philadelphia, where they have been employed in mission work every since.

We held services at our tent and found that not only Corlies pupils were here, but boys and girls from the school of Wrangell, Hydah, Sitka and Hoonah -- in the midst of temptations of every kind, and without a soul to care for their souls.

A strong appeal was sent to our Board in New York to send a live, earnest man and wife at once to take up the work in this place. Unable to meet this call in any other way, the Secretaries directed us to return to Juneau for the winter and organize the work.

This letter reached us at Sitka, by the very steamer to which I was carried -- by the stron advice of several physicians who thought there was no chance for my life -- to return to the States. Treatment and nursing in the old home so far restored my health that in six months we returned to take up our work -- and still no one else had been found who could undertake the native work in Juneau, though a Christian teacher for the Government day school at Haines, Chilkat Country, was secured. It was found that Juneau's growth had advanced rapidly during our absence, in both white and native population, more than justifying the appointment of a missionary to the whites separately. The Board sending my brother, Rev. Joseph P White, to fill

this position.

One of the sources of the Chilkat's trouble had been the destruction of their fur trade monopoly with the Stickx of the interior, by reason of the entrance of miners and the establishment of trading posts along the Yukon. Into their crying distress had come the news of this new wealth at their very door, and when we arrived at Juneau, in the early part of June, 1886, it was to find a good half of our Chilkat people here for work, large numbers also from fourteen other tribes, making a much larger native population than could be found at any other point in Alaska.

Though several years have passed since we began to work in this place and no one has been found to take from our hands the charge which cannot be laid down, so that we have come to regard ourselves as stationed here-- we came to Juneau with the hope of being soon permitted to go home to Chilkat.

Houses for rent were very scarce in the new little city. We were able to hire one for both families together, but only for a month. So for ourselves we built a house.

During that first month our very home sick children in Sitka claimed the promise they had exacted of us. That we were now in Juneau instead of Chilkat mattered nothing -- we were father and mother all the same, and home was with us -- so they came.

Our house was small, our accommodations few. Our floor was filled with our own made down beds; but we had a tent, and there was room outside for a camp fire, and that was the beginning of the Juneau Mission Home.

We then bought two lots just below our own, with a cabin which we occupied until our own house was under roof, then the cabin was fixed up to do for a small home, affording only a living and store room, with a boys' dormitory. The girls and teacher, Miss

Matthews, who had returned with us, being domiciled with us close by. For, in the meantime, several of our Chilkat girls, as well as boys, were brought all the way by their anxious parents to place them with us again, and it was impossible to refuse them.

We had no building available for church services. We had been directed to establish the work at Juneau, but there was no appropiations of funds made for its accomplishment, nor any definite promise of any.

We opened our entire ground floor for all church services, for both Sunday and week day meetings, but in the course of the year this failed to accommodate the people who came to hear the Gospel and many were turned away from our crowded doorway unable to get a word.

A church building became a pressing necessity, so, with only the little Home boys as helpers, Mr. Willard cut down through two or three feet of frozen ground to lay the foundations, and began the erection of our present pretty chapel, which was completed with but little hired help, and dedicated in July, 1888. At the same time the organization of the Juneau Klinggot Presbyterian Church was effected; its members coming from the older churches of Wrangell and Sitka, with some first fruits from the Chilkat Mission.

The Auk tribe, claiming Juneau as their "own place" had long been looked down upon by the Sitka and Chilkat tribes. We had often heard them spoken of as "the dogs," and "the slaves." They had never had a missionary of their own and they took pains to let it be known that they wanted none. The superciliousness of the Chilkats was not without jealous, sullen resentment. They would at first have nothing to do with us, and would not attend church; they would rather see a child of theirs dead than in a Mission Home. Our Chilkat children were subjected to every indignity that the Auks

could put on them, and were taunted with being slaves of the missionaries and prison-house-children.

But as the months passed by and their taunts of "Chilkat Missionaries" fell to the ground, things began to change. Through our knowledge of medicine and the furnishing of it freely, feeding the sick also, thus getting into their homes, and with God's blessing on it, they gradually came to attend church, then to risk a boy or two with us in the Home, and at last, all barriers broken down, we had not half enough room to house the boys and girls brought to us by the Auk people alone, and that, too, while we still had the children of the Chilkats.

When they began to come to us and the Chilkats, fearing that we were not going home, brought down to us the little ones who, they said, had been crying ever since we left them, we had been compelled, still without authority or appropriation from the Board, to add to our little Home a large, plain addition, which enabled us to have a teachers' room in the building and gave us accommodations for twenty children, though twenty-five had been crowded in.

On the Home lot there was no water fit for use, but on our own property, lying just above, we found a large, unfailing spring of pure, soft water, abundant enough to more than furnish both houses for every purpose. With simple hydraulic arrangements of his own fitting, Mr. Willard conveyed the water into the Home building, and, last year in to the laundry, which we were so happy as to add to the Home conveniences after receiving through the Board the sum made up by interested friends, refunding to us the money which we had actually expended on the church and Home property. Since then another generous friend has added to the grounds an adjoining lot, which will soon be enclosed by a good fence.

The work had grown so on our hands -- the Home full of

active, growing, wearing children who required much time and strength to keep even their bodies fed and clothed and washed -- the outside calls to the sick, sinful and distressed were so many, and the correspondence, my own house and family demanding time and care also -- that Miss Matthews and myself were both well worn when Miss Dunbar was sent to our aid in May of 1899.

We are now equipped right well. We have a church of steadily increasing growth and influence, in a neat, comfortable and pretty building.

Carrie M. Willard.

(Mrs. Eugene S.)

Mrs. Willard's Statement.
March 16, 1892.

In a recent conference with Mrs. Eugene S. Willard of Juneau, Alaska, we learned that very early in life she became interested in missionary work.

Being a sufferer from ill health in her youth, she was led to the study of medicine, a knowledge of which has been of inestimable service to her in later years.

Mr. Willard, while prosecuting his studies for the profession of a civil engineer was brought under the influence of a revival, when fifteen out of a class of twenty were converted. His plans of life now being changed, he took a classical course, being persuaded that he was called of God to missionary work. In opposition to the advice of his family and friends, who tried to persuade him that he had no gifts for such work, he presented himself to the Board of Home Missions for an appointment as a missionary worker simply, believing that having no theological training, he did not possess gifts for preaching, but he said; "If there is one place more difficult than another,--a place which no one else will occupy, then I am willing to go."

This was about a year and a half before Dr. Sheldon Jackson had thought of going to Alaska.

No one had been found to go to the Chilcat country, it being a place where personal danger was apprehended from the natives; the Board therefore gave Mr. Willard an appointment to this outpost and he signified his willingness to accept it. Mrs. Willard remarked, "Our experiences there are known only to God."

Amid their varied trials, through physical suffering, from isolation, the deprivation of personal comforts, and the loss of a child, they were "shut in to God," and were happy; feeling that they had reason to thank the Lord for sending them to this remote corner of the earth.

Our missionaries very soon saw the necessity of drawing children from their native surroundings; they felt that they must have a Home.

They worked; they wrote; they prayed for this end, and succeeded in raising through their friends the sum of #1500.

Mr. Willard, with a right hand crippled by scurvy, worked himself upon the building, holding a hammer between his thumb and first finger, teaching the Indians how to hollow logs on the under side, to fill the openings with moss and put t hem in place for walls.

Miss Bessie Mathews of Monmouth, Illinois was sent to take charge of the boarding department of the Home which was opened in 1883.

All the household work, that of cook, laundress, and general housekeeping had developed upon Mrs. Willard, her former medical training now also proving invaluable.

The need of family accommodations being imperative, Mr. Willard, calling again into action his mechanical skill, began to arrange for a little home; but this being unfinished when he was called away to attend a Presbyterial meeting, Mrs. Willard, with the help of twelve or thirteen boys, laid with her own hands the floors of the dining-room and kitchen.

During eleven years of incessant toil came only six months of rest, and these were passed in suffering.

A resort to the sulphur hot springs, which are found about

sixteen miles from Sitka, proved at one time beneficial to Mrs. Willard.

On their return journey to the Chilcat field after the season of rest above referred to, touching at Juneau, evil disposed white men represented that the hostility of the natives to missionaries was at that time so great, that should they attempt to proceed, their boats would be stoned and they would never land alive.

Juneau is in a gold mining region where many white men congregate; it is also a gathering place for natives who are in search of work. It is opposite Douglass Island.

The gold fever had opened the mines to such an extent that five hundred miners had been called for at two dollars a day, and 1500people must have been gathered here.

Two representative miners proposed to our missionaries that they should remain here, offering them temporarily a house in which to teach their children.

This being considered such an important point, the Board proposed that Mrs. and Mr. Willard should remain here for a time and establish a mission.

To this proposal they acceeded, there being as many or more Chilcat people here as in their old home; and being familiar with the language spoken by twelve of the fifteen tribes here congregated.

Their first dwelling was in an old shop which they rented for $17. a month; not another place could be found.

Their old Chilcat people came by the dozen, asking "What are you doing here?"

Chilcat children flocked back. As soon as it was known that they were to stay parents brought their children and said; "You have taught the children to love you; now you are throwing them away."

The house could not shelter all. They were obliged to put some boys in a tent. Winter was coming on and there was no place for a fire except outside the tent. The only hospitable place that could be found was a cabin -- a mere shanty, having two rooms, divided by a partition of up and down boards.

There was no staircase, but only a rough ladder leading to the loft above. This room was afterwards occupied by Miss Mathews who received many a bump against the rafters.

The cabin was built of rough spruce and hemlock boards which were cracked and open, but being obliged to take this place our friends moved in with all the children that it would accommodate, yet some had to be left outside. Boys and girls were rushing headlong from Chilcat and Sitka.

There were thirty saloons in the town and a population of from seven to eight hundred white people.

Mr. Willard purchased two lots on ground where the shanty stood and (at his own expense) began to put up a house, thinking that it would shelter his ministerial successor -- they expecting all the time to return to Chilcat.

The winters here are very severe, the thermometer often falling to 15 degrees below zero. The atmosphere is so saturated with water that the wind is very cutting.

It often rains seven days out of eight, and on the eighth day it rains harder still from the ground. When during a dry season a steamer touches at Juneau, it brings a 15 minutes shower.

There were now 19 children, and some of them in the tent.

Drying the week's wash for so many within doors and with their crowded quarters did not add materially to their comfort.

There was no place for holding religious servises except in the Willard home, so their little rooms were opened for Sabbath and prayer-meeting services. Every week the people came and, packed like sardines, sitting on the floor, 300 would crowd into these small rooms while as many would go away.

In March, when the ground was frozen two feet deep, Mr. Willard took axes and with the boys chopped through the soil (which is composed of decayed wood, and frozen into solid ice,) to make the foundation for a church.

Lumber was purchased from an old building on mission premises at Tsek-nuk-sank,y, and brought by water a distance of about 25 miles in chop-sesa, through a dangerous channel, which furnished part of the material, but being old and saturated with water it proved of little value, in the end costing more than new.

In July, 1886, the new church, which is described by tourists as a marvously neat little building, (built and painted by Mr. Willard's own hands,) was ready for dedication.

A generous friend visiting Juneau made our missionaries personal gifts, but these were all given for the church.

As Mr. Willard's health was very much improved, he requested the Board to send a minister and asked what he should do next. It was the wish of the Board that he should remain as Pastor of this native church.

At these services his assistant as interpreter is a pupil from the school, named Alice Knowalt.

The work in Alaska is not only a contest with heathenism, but with the evil practices of white men and the encroachments of Romanism.

When the natives touch at certain points, these will hold their canoes until they consent to be baptised; then they will put around their necks a cross or ticket assuring them that now they will be sure to go to heaven. This easy road to heaven has its attractions for the natives.

A poor native Christian was struggling with poverty and almost starving because he would keep the Sabbath, having refused to work on that day. When he asked a blessing at his scantily supplied table his heathenish parents would taunt him for his devotion to a God who allowed him almost to starve. At last his step-father for whom he had been praying was taken ill, and seemed inclined to think of a better world; as he expressed it, "Your God is boss of it." "I would like to go to the good world," he said, "but I would rather be a Russian or a Romish Chtistian, for they can get drunk and work on Sunday."

Natives of the Yahk (awk) tribe were found among the mingled population of Juneau, but to them the missionaries were not welcome. These people had long resided here and were unprogressive.

Through visiting and caring for the sick they were at last won to friendliness, although they had been accustomed to ridicule the school children, calling them prison-house children and slaves.

After a year or a year and a half they began to bring their sick to the station, then they came to church; finally they begged that their children might be received into the school.

Enlargement became necessary. The old shop was originally without a floor, and rough boards had to be laid down, which in time wore away.

In each dormitory there were ten girls and ten boys. From September to March they were obliged to refuse 50 children, just as promising as those already in the school. The discipline was

so good thet it was only necessary to expel one child.

It wasa remarkable providence that while other people were paying for their supply of water MR. Willard discovered a pure, sparkling spring on his osn property, which, (at a cost of $30. he doing all the plumbing,) furnished an abundant supply for the Home and proved sufficient for three other families, thus bringing in a rental of $9. per month.

Again Mrs. Willard is visiting the east, partly to secure much needed rest, and partly to plead the cause of the Juneau Mission. During her absence, Mrs. Willard has left a very reliable native girl to assist Miss Mathews in the care of the home. This girl had been sold by her parents to a white man, but she ran away, seeking a refuge in the Home, and proves a valuable helper.

Mrs. Willard tells us that the older part of the Home building is no longer habitable; it must be sawed off and a new one erected; for this enlargement plans have been carefully prepared, that accommodations may be provided for 40 children.

That which is especially emphasized is a hospital room remote from the family. Formerly Mrs. Willard was obliged to care for these in her own home.

There must be a laundry and bath rooms , also separate bed rooms for the little boys.

These little ones have been well cared for and tucked into bed at night with mother love and prayer.

Accommodation for a teacher is also needed.

Heating with steam or hot air will cost $500.

Disposing of the old building, putting up the new, renovating the old part which remains, repairing and re-seating the church, putting in a new floor, painting &c., will cost but $5000.

If this sum can be raised in thirty days, word can be sent to Mr. Willard to provide material and procure needed help, so that work may be begun at once, and the building occupied by September. If this is not done, the Home must be broken up and disaster follow.

As societies are now beginning to disband for the summer, the raising of this sum will depend largely upon individual effort.

We make an earnest appeal for such efforts at once. Cannot Presbyterial and local societies, desiring to assist this important enterprise, interest friends not yet personally engaged in the work, to contribute this amount?

Our opportunity to help lies within the limit of a short month and Juneau's opportunity seems to be emphatically <u>now.</u>